

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2020

Remarks in a Meeting With Governor Kimberly K. Reynolds of Iowa and an Exchange With Reporters

May 6, 2020

The President. Well, thank you very much. And it's an honor to have Governor Kim Reynolds, who is a spectacular Governor, somebody that's done very well in every respect. But we're really here talking today about testing and about COVID-19. And we have a lot of good understanding. We've worked very closely together. We've helped the people of Iowa. And I thought you would introduce your great doctor that you brought.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. And maybe you could give us a little talk in front of the media.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. And if you're different than me, you might actually get accurate coverage, which would be fantastic. [*Laughter*] Right? You may get accurate.

But, Kim, thank you very much for being with us. And please, what would you like to say?

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. Well, first of all, I appreciate the opportunity. I appreciate the opportunity to be here to personally say thank you to both you and the Vice President and your incredible team. The partnership and the collaboration as we've moved through this pandemic has been incredible. And we've—not only for the calls that we have weekly, the coordination between the Governors, to really—you personally get on and ask if there's anything that we need to help address the pandemic in our States. I appreciate that very much.

Testing has been one of the areas that we are really leading on, so we know that that's critical for us to start to reopen Iowa. We have—through the Test Iowa process, we have an assessment that Iowans can take and really monitor their own health. That will help us identify where some of the hotspots or clusters might be.

And then, we have significantly increased our testing capacity, so thank you. We've gone from 300 a day in March, to 1,300 a day in April, to almost 3,000 a day, now—today. And we hope to increase that up to 5,000.

The President. That's great.

Gov. Reynolds. It's really——

The President. Wow.

Gov. Reynolds. And it really is making a difference.

And then, on top of that, we're doing really some robust case investigation and contact tracing, which has helped us identify, kind of, the scope of the virus activity so that we can be targeted in our approach and really help prevent it from really spiking and spreading. And so it helps us kind of contain and manage the virus as we move forward.

I have with me today our State epidemiologist, Dr. Pedati, and her team rocks. So on a day-in-and-day-out basis, they are really providing us the data and helping us monitor the way that we deal with COVID-19 in the State of Iowa, and the impact that it has on Iowans.

So maybe she could talk a little bit about what——

The President. Sure.

Gov. Reynolds. —we're doing, if you're okay with that.

The President. Doctor, please.

Iowa Department of Public Health Medical Director Caitlin Pedati. Absolutely. Thank you, Governor Reynolds, and thank you very much, Mr. President, for the time. You know, I think, like many States over the past several months, Iowa has really worked with our public health professionals, with our clinical partners, and with our laboratory partners at the local, State, and of course, Federal levels, to help enhance the resources and capacity that we have as part of this response. And so we've been able to do things like modernize our data systems, enhance our workforce capacity for public health case investigation and contact tracing, and, of course, expand our testing resources.

[*At this point, Medical Director Pedati continued her remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And so we continue to recognize that there is much we don't know about the virus. We know we have much to learn, for example, about serology and whether there is presence of neutralizing antibodies or how long people might enjoy that immunity. But we're hopeful that we can continue to use a variety of tools to help us get Iowans back to the ways that they live and interact and work, which, of course, includes the many Iowans that feed the Nation.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. And what do you think of the immunity? What's your feeling? You have it—are you immune? Or is just for a year? Or is it less? What do you think?

Medical Director Pedati. I think it's an example of a place that we're just going to need to learn a little bit more.

The President. And that only comes with time?

Medical Director Pedati. It does come with time. And you know, this is a virus that's relatively new. You know, we only learned about at the end of last year. And I think the public health and clinical communities have done a tremendous amount of work in a short period of time. And I think that's due in large part to the support that we have when we work together and also to flexibility. I think remaining flexible and looking at new resources and new ways to provide public health support across the State has been very important in Iowa.

The President. Good.

Gov. Reynolds. I think, though, doing the serology testing with the diagnostic and PCR, it's really—there's—we're learning more and more about asymptomatic individuals. And so that's helped us kind of identify that, especially as we're trying to get the workforce back into the manufacturing and processing plants so that we can keep them up and going.

To better understand those that are testing positive, those that we know have at least had it and have the immunity in their system, it really brings some confidence to the workforce—to go back into the plant to really make sure that we're separating the shifts, and so that we're providing the confidence of a safe work environment so that they feel comfortable going back to work and going back into the facility. So it's been a—

The President. That's great.

Gov. Reynolds. —big piece of us really being able to stand up and keep operating the processing plants, which are so important to our ability to feed not only the country, but the world.

The President. That's going much better now?

Gov. Reynolds. Yes, it is. Yes, we're making good progress.

The President. How important is tracing?

Medical Director Pedati. It's a very important part of routine public health activities. And this was something that we do for a variety of illnesses, and we adapt that approach depending on which illness we're talking about and which risk factor we want to assess. So if it's a foodborne illness, we'll ask you what you ate. And if it's COVID, we want to know where you've traveled, who you've been around, what your job is, so that we can understand what the risk might be, not just how you might have gotten it, but right now, more importantly, who else might have been exposed.

And so what it lets us do, as both case investigation and contact tracing, is understand more about this disease so that we can get better at limiting its spread and optimizing the outcomes for people who are more at risk. And it allows us to make a targeted, one-on-one touchpoint with people who have been exposed, to reinforce what they need to do on a personal level to keep themselves healthy.

The President. Is COVID the most contagious of everything that you've seen? Is there anything that you've ever seen like this?

Medical Director Pedati. You know, when we speak about contagiousness, we often talk about something called an R-naught value, or the amount of people who might become ill in a truly naive population if exposed to the virus. So things like measles, for example, have very high R-naughts. They're very infectious, you know, 12 or higher. There have been early research around COVID that shows that it might be around the two to three range. But it's another example of a place where I think we need to learn more together as a national and global community.

The President. Right. So you're really learning a lot. We're in the process of learning.

Medical Director Pedati. Oh—that's absolutely right. You know, and we continue to do that.

The President. Deborah agrees with you, right?

White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Deborah L. Birx. Yes.

Gov. Reynolds. Well, every day, right?

Medical Director Pedati. Every day.

Gov. Reynolds. I mean, to think it's only been 2 months from where we started and what we know today. And just having—what we learn every single day has been incredible.

Medical Director Pedati. Which is why being flexible, I think——

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

Medical Director Pedati. ——is so important in this response.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. So do you think, in the fall, it could come back, even if it's in a lesser form and we put it out? Or do you think there's a good chance that it won't come back?

Medical Director Pedati. I think it's another example of a place that we have more to learn about this virus. And part of what we've done over the past several months is use time to put the resources and structure in place to be better prepared if that is the situation.

The President. We'll be definitely——

Gov. Reynolds. Oh, absolutely. I mean, that was—when we first entered into this, when we were talking about stabilizing the virus, we didn't know if we'd have the ICU beds or the vents or the capacity, with our health care system. And today, we're able to demonstrate to Iowans the capacity that we have and the utilization that we have. And we're at about 80-percent availability of vents and ICU beds.

And so by demonstrating that, and by the time that was bought with the testing, we now really can start to open up Iowa in a responsible manner using the data that we have, knowing that our health care system won't be overwhelmed; that we are at a position, in case we do see some type of a surge. They have—there's been unprecedented collaboration between the hospitals across the State, based on a region, to really identifying and understand what our resource capacity is—

The President. Yes, it's great.

Gov. Reynolds. —within the State to address it.

The President. We learned a lot.

Gov. Reynolds. We've learned a lot.

The President. So the media likes to say we have the most cases, but we do, by far, the most testing. If we did very little testing, we wouldn't have the most cases. So, in a way, by doing all of this testing, we make ourselves look bad. For instance, they would say we have more than China. I don't think so. We have more than other countries. I don't think so.

But by doing all of the testing—I'd love to get that chart from yesterday. It's such an incredible chart. We do many times—we've done more testing than every other country combined. I mean, to think: so we're going to have more cases because we do more testing. Otherwise, you don't know if you have a case. I think that's a correct statement.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes, well, in Iowa right now, on a per capita basis, we've tested 1 in 50 Iowans. I mean, that's significant. But that really provides us the data that we need to understand the virus activity better. And so we are aggressively testing, and we're testing in hotspots, so our numbers are going to go up.

But we need to look at trends, and we need to look at other—virus activity is really, I think, what we need to focus on now and how we start to contain and manage that as we move forward.

The President. So do you think it goes away—it maybe comes back a little bit or a lot, but do you think it goes away in Iowa before the end of the summer?

Medical Director Pedati. I think it's hard to predict. And, again, I think that part of what's been so important about the response so far is how we coordinate to be prepared for a variety of scenarios, whether this is a virus that becomes endemic and becomes part of seasonal illness; whether this is a virus that we see continued ups and downs and that we're able to monitor closely with the data modernization tools that we have and target resources, like testing, when we detect increases to help reaffirm with people the public health measures that they need to take while we await the additional resources, like medications and, subsequently, vaccines.

So I think it's all part of how we look at managing this long term—

The President. And only time will tell that.

Gov. Reynolds. And only time—

Medical Director Pedati. I think that's right.

The President. And you can't make—based on data, you can't make predictions? Pretty much, you—it's impossible?

Medical Director Pedati. You know, I think predictions—and there's a variety of efforts in, you know, a variety of places about modeling a couple of different potential—or forecasting different potential outcomes. And I think those are valuable things to do because they help you think about preparing, which is a big part of public health. But I think we have to keep in mind that we use the real-time data that we're getting, and we target resources as quickly as we possibly can.

The President. Good.

Medical Director Pedati. I also think that using the public health systems that we've developed—things like the way we track influenza across the country that we've been doing for decades—to think about taking all of those pieces and to understanding activity levels across the State and across the Nation are going to be important approaches to looking at this in the long term.

Gov. Reynolds. And very similar, right?

The President. And how do you compare this to—yes. How do you compare this to, as you said, influenza? How do you compare it?

Medical Director Pedati. Part of the challenge with a new virus is that you have a population that's never seen it before. So everybody is susceptible, and we don't yet have a medication or vaccine, which makes it a little bit trickier than influenza. And so it means that, right now, we talk a lot more about public health mitigation strategies—things like washing your hands frequently, you know, staying home when you're sick—and also making sure that we're providing the resources through public health and clinical and laboratory workforce to help direct efforts at controlling the spread by working with people who we know have tested positive.

The President. So I have known people that have had the flu. All my life, I've known people—many, many people.

[*A White House aide brought the President a chart and placed it on a table next to his chair.*]

Oh, that's our testing. Look.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. So that's—this is us. This is our testing. Obviously, I'm referring to this line; otherwise, I wouldn't be showing you the chart. [*Laughter*] Because they'd then be saying: "Who's that one? They did a good job." Right? But this is the United States. This is Germany and India. And, let's see, Japan, South Korea are down here.

So if we did tests down here, we're going to have very few cases. If we do tests up here, we're going to have many more cases. So they keep saying, "They have a million cases." Well, that's because we're doing a lot of testing. Otherwise, Deborah—in fact, I'm doing it because of Deborah. She keeps saying, "Keep going." We're going to break—pretty soon, we're going to need a longer piece of paper.

But we don't get credit for it from the fake news media. It's a terrible thing. But someday. Let's see. John [John Roberts, Fox News]—John has been very nice to us.

But look at that. Isn't that something? Are you surprised by that, John? He's not allowed to say, by the way, because he's a reporter. [*Laughter*] He's not surprised. Is anybody surprised? Would anybody—

Impressive, though, right? Impressive. Look. Dead, stone-faced. No—look. No? Not impressed?

Q. You can't read my face with a mask. *[Laughter]*

The President. I've got my photographer back there. My Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer—he'll agree with me. We take great pictures together.

So anyway, there's the story. And that's—you know, to me, that's a big deal. Here, you can have that. Give it to your husband.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. Yes, okay. *[Laughter]*

The President. So I want to thank you very much. You're very lucky to have this young lady.

Gov. Reynolds. Oh, yes. Absolutely. And now I'm seeing the danger of maybe bringing her here—*[laughter]*.

The President. No, I'm going to steal her. I'm stealing her.

Gov. Reynolds. —because I can see the world is going to know how lucky I am. I have an incredible team, and you know that. I mean, that is really what allows us to stand up with confidence and talk about how we're going to move through the coronavirus and, really, the strategies that we're putting in place.

And it's because of Dr. Pedati and her team, it really gives me great confidence when I talk to Iowans about how we are going to get through this, and we're going to learn to live with COVID-19. It's not going to go away for a while, so we need to learn how to manage it and not have it control our lives. And I believe that we can do that in a safe and responsible way, based on the testing, based on the data that we have in real time, and the targeted approach that we can take moving forward.

And then, people—we have to be responsible. If you're a vulnerable, older adult with underlying conditions, you need to stay home. We still have our social distancing that we talk about every single day. And we're not allowing people to gather in groups of more than 10. So we're being—you told us to be responsible—

The President. Yes.

Gov. Reynolds. —and we're being responsible. And I think, by doing that, we can really start to move through this.

The President. And I'm being responsible too. I think we should put you on the Task Force. I really do.

Gov. Reynolds. Oh, you can do that. You just can't take her.

The President. Can we do that?

Gov. Reynolds. You just can't take her.

The President. No, no, I promise we won't. Only for the Task Force. But I'm not going to steal her—

Gov. Reynolds. Okay. Promise?

The President. —because that's—I've lost friends by doing that.

Gov. Reynolds. Okay. *[Laughter]*

The President. No, no. But I think you should be on the Task Force. Would you like to do that?

Medical Director Pedati. Mr. President, I'd be happy to serve however you would like.

The President. It's such a great deal and such a big, important thing. And—but I'm only going to do it if I have Dr. Birx's permission. You'll work together.

But do you like the idea?

Ambassador Birx. No, absolutely. I think what's been so exciting about many of the States that don't get to be featured is, they've been doing mitigation where they had to, but they've been doing outbreak investigation, contact tracing, and stopping the spread of the virus. And I think that's been very inspirational. And I think when they go into these plants and they test everyone, it was from individuals like this team that allowed us to see how much asymptomatic disease spread there was.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. Yes.

Ambassador Birx. And so we have to—that's why we have to have these additional tools, and they've brought that to bear, both at nursing homes and in these meatpacking plants. But, really, taking it broader than that and ensuring the individuals who are associated with the meatpacking plant are also protected. And that's really given us insight into how to do functional contact tracing based on testing.

The President. Yes.

Ambassador Birx. We really had to deploy it.

The President. And we should be talking about the meatpacking plant also. But I think it would be a tremendous—I'm serious about it. I'd love for you to be on the Task Force. I only have one thing I have to do: The great Vice President of the United States, I have to get his approval for this—[laughter]—because he's headed up the Task Force. And maybe, he'll say, "I don't want her under any circumstance." [Laughter] Be careful. He can do it.

Gov. Reynolds. Same thing goes then, Mr. Vice President.

The President. What do you think, Mike? Do you like the idea?

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Mr. President, I'm so grateful for the Governor's leadership in Iowa, so very impressed with her team. Iowa has been leading the pack.

Gov. Reynolds. Thank you.

Vice President Pence. What you've done on testing, Governor Reynolds, with the Test Iowa initiative; deploying resources; working very closely with our Task Force, Mr. President, to keep America's food supply rolling, the meat-processing plants, it is—as Dr. Birx said, it is an example.

There are areas of the country where we have had to pay much more attention, where the outbreak has been much greater, and that's been right and proper, Mr. President: the greater New York City area, New Orleans, Detroit, Chicago. But Iowa, with Governor Reynolds's leadership, has been a success story because whether it be the mitigation efforts, social distancing efforts, and now rolling out testing at a record pace in the State, Iowa has stayed in front of this effort and really represented some of the very best State response across the Heartland.

The President. Incredible, right?

Gov. Reynolds. Thank you.

The President. And having somebody from Iowa on the Task Force——

Gov. Reynolds. Yes, it would be great.

The President. —would be great. That's great.

Gov. Reynolds. Especially with the food supply chain.

The President. Thank you very much. We'll let you know about meetings.

Secretary of Agriculture George E. "Sonny" Perdue III. Mr. President, you also need to understand your Executive order from last week empowered our Governors in this meat-processing to do that. And that's been a tremendous—it's given comfort to the companies, as well as the employees, over the gold standard of CDC and OSHA from worker protection, along there with the testing has been a tremendous help. We're turning the corner on that.

The President. Tell us how we're doing with that food chain.

Secretary Perdue. The plants are reopening in Iowa and other places. We may have still a few closed, but we are working. They're opening this week. And I think we've turned the corner, based on that commonality—

The President. It's really—[inaudible]. Okay.

Secretary Perdue. —of uniform standards there.

Gov. Reynolds. Oh, absolutely. Without hesitation. And I was on the call with several of our managers yesterday from the different facilities, and they asked that I extend a sincere thank-you for that Executive order.

The President. Right.

Gov. Reynolds. It really has brought conformity across this—the country.

The President. Good.

Gov. Reynolds. And it was a very positive thing. And it really—and then just helping make sure that we're protecting the workforce too, and it's working in conjunction with that. So it goes hand in hand so it should—.

The President. So your plant is—how many plants do you have closed?

Gov. Reynolds. Well, we—no, so we only have—we don't have any shut down right now. We're at reduced capacity.

Secretary Perdue. Perry is back up.

Gov. Reynolds. Perry is back up. In fact, they're at 60-percent capacity, and we just started the extensive testing last week with them, so it's a relatively good turnaround time.

The President. Good. So you'll be in good shape.

Gov. Reynolds. Columbus Junction is at a hundred percent. Waterloo is still shut down, but they're planning on coming back tomorrow. So we do have one. But we really—and we've been able to maintain a lot of them just at reduced capacity, while we did the testing.

And to your point too, Dr. Birx, the contact tracing has been really, really a critical component of this. And we're doing it not only in our processing plants, but in our long-term care facilities as well.

And I want to give a shout-out to our National Guard because, because of Title 32, we've been able—they're a big piece of not only our testing strike teams that were going into communities across the State, but also on our contact tracing. They've provided about 150 soldiers that are really helping us plow through.

Secretary Perdue. That's right.

Gov. Reynolds. Because we're testing so much——

Ambassador Birx. Yes.

Gov. Reynolds. ——can you imagine the volume that we have for the contact tracing and what that entails? And so they've really been able to step up and step in and really help us through these efforts as well.

The President. I'm just watching—what a great Governor—the enthusiasm, the knowledge. You know, you need both. You can't just have one or the other.

Gov. Reynolds. Well, we have a great team. We're blessed.

The President. No, it's a—it's really—you have a great Governor. A really great Governor in Iowa. Thank you very much. Thank you, Kim.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. John, go ahead.

Food Supply Chain/Meatpacking Plants

Q. Mr. President, I was actually speaking with the Governor about this before she came to see you: There's a backlog in terms of live animals—hogs and beef on the hoof—out there. How soon will it be before that can get processed? And we are seeing some shortages in meats in many places across the country. How long will it be before the supply chain gets ramped back up again so that we're—we don't have these shortages?

The President. Right. Plenty of supply. Go ahead.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes, I think so. We're moving in that direction, as the Secretary said. You've got to think South Dakota is coming back onboard. We'll have most of our facilities up and going.

And so as we continue to keep them up and processing and bring more back on line and continue to exceed the capacity, we're going to, hopefully, prevent what could have been, you know, a really sorry situation where we were euthanizing some of our protein supply and really impacting the food supply not only across the country, but throughout the world.

And so this is critical infrastructure. It's an essential workforce. And the team and the effort and the Executive order, I think, has really maybe prevented what could have been a really serious situation.

And so I think—Secretary, would you agree with that? We're——

Secretary Perdue. Yes, I think we've turned——

Gov. Reynolds. We're still monitoring it. We've turned a corner.

Secretary Perdue. I think we've turned the corner. We see these plants coming back on line. Obviously, because of some infected employees, they won't be full force for a while, but we think the stores will be—you'll see more variety——

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. Yes.

Secretary Perdue. ——and more meat cases fully supplied.

The President. And what's your timing? What's your timing, Sonny?

Secretary Perdue. I'd say probably a week to 10 days——

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. That's right.

Secretary Perdue. ——where it's fully back up.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. Fully back up?

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. I mean, Perry came back up at 60——

The President. That'll be great.

Gov. Reynolds. ——60-percent capacity, which is really—that's a strong start up.

Vice President Pence. Mr. President, what the Governors have made clear is that it was because the President used the Defense Production Act——

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

Vice President Pence. ——to make it clear that our objective is to keep meat-processing plants open, whether it be in Iowa, whether it be Delaware, whether it be in Colorado. And working through the Department of Agriculture, deploying CDC personnel to these meat-processing plants, we're doing that.

[*Vice President Pence continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

And thanks to the President's decision to use the Defense Production Act, we now have uniformity. And the objective is to work every day to keep those meat-processing plants open. And the ones that were coming down are going back on line.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

Secretary Perdue. While we're trying to keep the workers safe and healthy, along with these guidelines.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. It's in tandem. We've done that.

And so, with the testing, with the PPE, with the restructuring in the facilities, they're also doing a lot of that as well to try to social distance where they can, to put in shields where they can, to look at the lines, to separate the shifts.

So, I mean, they really——

The President. And I think they——

Gov. Reynolds. ——and the partnership, really——

The President. Kim, I think we had a great talk with the owners of the plants, the top people. Big people. These are big companies, actually. You wouldn't believe how many plants they have. And I think it was a very strong talk, and I think they got the message.

So, within a week and a half, we should be in great shape. Maybe sooner.

Meatpacking Plants/Agriculture Industry

Q. Another piece of it is, as the price for animals on the hoof has gone down, the price of boxed beef has really skyrocketed, and there's a huge price differential disparity there. Farmers are really hurting, whereas these meatpacking plants are making a lot of money. Is there something that the Federal Government can do? Farmers are asking.

The President. Yes. Well, I'll ask the Justice Department to look into it. Okay? I will ask them to take a very serious look into it, because it shouldn't be happening that way. And we want to protect our farmers. But they're looking into that very strongly.

Q. What exactly, sir?

The President. I said I've asked the Justice Department to look into it.

Q. To look into what?

Q. To look into—

The President. For whatever.

Q. —the disparity?

The President. Why is there disparity? What's going on? Are they dealing with each other? What's going on? Okay? Because it shouldn't be that way. Supply and demand should not allow that to happen, by normal supply and demand. Okay?

Thank you, John. Any other questions?

Meatpacking Plants

Q. Are enough steps being taken to protect these workers?

The President. Say it again.

Q. Are enough steps being taken to protect the health and safety of these workers? The advocates for these workers say they're not being protected.

The President. Mike, go ahead.

Q. I mean, what was it, 60-percent infected at the Perry plant? Right? I mean, that's extraordinary.

Vice President Pence. Well, what we've looked at in each of these plants is, when we have an outbreak, the CDC deploys a team on the ground. We also worked with the Governor and other Governors around the country to deploy personal protective equipment to allow the workforce to safely return once testing is done. In most of these meat-processing plants, we end up testing everyone in the facility. And the people that are healthy are able to return with new countermeasures and new protection, new face masks or gloves, as the case may be.

And we're also working with the companies to put new countermeasures into place. But as the Secretary said, our objective is two equal goals. Number one is the safety and health of the workforce in our meat-processing plants and to ensure the strength of the food supply by getting people back to work and keeping the plants open.

The President. Kim.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. No, I would completely agree with that. As I said, I was on a call with most them yesterday. Thank you for the conference call that you did, I think, this week, last week with our producers and Governors across the country, specifically addressing this processing issue. So I appreciate that very much, Mr. Vice President.

And just to ask if they were having any trouble getting the PPE: No. They were fine. We are seeing the supply chain open up. I appreciate what the administration has done to make sure that they are—they have the adequate PPE to protect their employees.

You know, this is their teammates. This is an essential workforce. They know how important it is to take care of their workforce. And a big part of it was providing them the confidence to go back into the facility knowing that they'd either tested positive and they'd recovered or they were on a shift with other employees that had tested negative.

And we'll continue to work with them. We've made it very clear if they want to additional testing, we'll be happy to do that. But they are testing them before they even enter the plant. They're doing a temperature scan. They're doing an assessment. They have to have the mask on

when they enter the facility. Many times, they have the mask and the face shield. They're doing social distancing. They're relaxing their attendance policy.

The President. And they feel much better, don't they?

Gov. Reynolds. And they feel better. Yes. So you know, it's a partnership. We're all working together to make sure that we're providing them the confidence of a safe environment, but at the same time, we're making sure that the food supply chain is moving and that the country is being fed. And we're continuing to turn—[inaudible].

The President. Will they be moving the Plexiglas partitions a little further?

Gov. Reynolds. So they are. It's a fairly close working arrangement, and so they are trying to separate, I think, with some additional space between the workforce. So I know it's some of the things that they're looking at. But they do it where they can. They put some of the shields, partitions in place. Yes.

White House Coronavirus Task Force

Q. Mr. President, a follow-up on the Task Force. What will Dr. Fauci's role be in the Task Force going forward?

The President. Same as it is now.

Q. Okay.

The President. He's been doing a very good job. We're very happy with Dr. Fauci, and he'll be doing the same, and Deborah will be doing the same. I know you'll be staying. I hope you'll be staying. We'd miss you otherwise. She's done a fantastic job. Both. No, same thing.

We're actually just adding some names. We may take off a couple that, frankly, you know, their expertise really no longer applies. But I think, Mike, you'll announce your names Monday, maybe.

Vice President Pence. Yes, sir.

The President. Or sooner.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Good names. And now we have a very distinguished person who really knows her business.

The Wendy's Company/Meatpacking Plants

Q. A follow-up on beef, apparently, Wendy's has a shortage.

The President. I'll have to call Nelson Peltz. [Laughter] I'll have to—I'm going to call Nelson Peltz. He's going to be—they're going to be okay. They'll be all right.

Q. They're focusing on chicken.

The President. Basically, you're saying, in a week and a half, you think everything is going to be good, or sooner.

Secretary Perdue. That's right. Yes.

The President. All right. Would you make sure, please?

Secretary Perdue. These plants are opening as we speak. They're—you know, this week—the first next week——

The President. And you're going to have to push them. Push them more.

Gov. Reynolds. Yes. And they're ramping up capacity, so——

The President. Okay?

White House Coronavirus Task Force

Q. Mr. President, you had said earlier that when you were talking about winding down the Task Force, you'd heard from a lot of respected people who wanted you to keep it open.

The President. Highly respected. Yes.

Q. Who are some of the individuals? Can you——

The President. Well, I'd rather not say, because some of them aren't going to be able to make it. People want to be on the Task Force. They want to be on everything. You know, I've never seen anything like this. Anything having to do with this, they want to help. Every——

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. ——the biggest people, they want to be on. They want to be on the committees. They want to be on the financial committee or the sports committee.

Q. Have you heard from any who would want to be on the Task Force?

The President. I've heard of—heard? That's all I do. I get calls from people—the biggest people. They all want to be on. Enemies of mine—people that don't like me—want to be on the committees. I said, "That's strange." But they all want to do, and they all want to help. So we're going to be announcing some very good names.

Now, in this case, you know, we want professional names that can help us, not just names where we put it on for the status of the Task Force. We don't need status; we need results.

Coronavirus Outbreak in China

Q. Mr. President, last week, when you were in the East Room, I asked you about intelligence regarding the source of the virus. You suggested that you had seen some intelligence that gave you some confidence that it somehow emanated from the Institute of Virology. The Secretary of State on Sunday said the same thing. Where are you now on that issue?

The President. No different. No difference.

Q. Have you seen anything else that gives you more confidence?

The President. No. I don't think there'll be a big difference. If you ask me that question in 2 months, I don't think there'll be a big difference. And I think we know, and I think you probably know too.

Okay. Any other questions?

China-U.S. Trade Agreement

Q. Just one follow-up on China, sir, related to the intelligence, but more specifically to how you will respond to China. You've talked about tariffs. Would you like to put tariffs on China as a punishment, or would it be more related to China not actually——

The President. I don't want to talk about that now.

Q. Okay.

The President. We're in the midst of some very big things, so I just don't want to talk about that now.

Q. Are you satisfied with China in terms of how it's fulfilling the trade deal, phase one?

The President. I will be able to report on that the end of next week. They're buying a lot of farm product, but are they buying to the level that they were supposed to? You know, they were going to buy \$50 billion worth. The most they ever did was 15 or 16, and now they're going to 50. Anywhere between 40 and 50, in terms of farm. But \$250 billion overall. That's some—that never happened. No President has ever even talked about anything like that. It's about time.

But I'll be able to report in about a week or two, as to not only with the farmers, but with many other industries also. Okay?

Secretary Perdue. We'll have some updated ag numbers in this Friday.

The President. Okay, good. I'd like to have that. I'll report them as they come in. But we're watching closely. And you know, they understand. They have a deal. Hopefully, they're going to keep the deal. We'll see. They may, they may not. We're going to find out. We'll know soon.

Availability of Medical Supplies and Equipment/U.S. Exports of Vital Supplies

Q. On the ventilators that you say you're giving to other countries, how do you decide who gets them? Do they have to return them? Are you donating them?

The President. Well, we have thousands of ventilators right now under development and already in storage, as you know. We're stockpiling. We have over 10,000. We've sent them to States. The States are all—you have plenty of ventilators, right?

Gov. Reynolds. Yes.

The President. Did you ever think that was possible?

Gov. Reynolds. Nope. [*Laughter*]

The President. They never wrote a story about it, Kim. Never.

Gov. Reynolds. No.

The President. And that's a tough one.

Gov. Reynolds. We're at 80- to 85-percent availability.

The President. That's not like a swab. That's not like a swab that's a piece of cotton. This is a big deal, doing a ventilator.

So countries know that we have tremendous amount—tremendous volume. And they've been calling. Nigeria just called. We're giving them 250 ventilators. We have many countries—I'd say 12, 14 countries that called. We're sending quite a few to France. We're sending quite a few to Spain and Italy. And we have other countries—we have four African countries, countries located in Africa, who are really in bad shape, frankly. Very bad shape. And we're sending them quite a few.

So we're in a position where we can now help other people, because, basically, what are you talking—you're talking about people dying. You know, it's not a question of countries. You're talking about a lot of people are dying. And we make a great ventilator, as you people found out. Your people actually told me the—you know, there are good ventilators and not so good. We go top of the line. We're making all top of the line.

So we're sending them to a lot of countries as they need them. And they—they call.

Q. And are those donations? Will they have to be returned, or can they keep them?

The President. So we're working on that. And, in a certain way, I like them to be donations. I really do. I think it's good will. It's hard to say you have to pay us in order to save people from dying. And I'm the first one to say you've got to pay.

But you know, this is something that's a little bit different. I think it's something they really appreciate more than normally like, you know, you're doing some trade for some linen or whatever it is. You—a ventilator will save lives. And they are really—some of these countries have none. Larry Kudlow knows. I mean, you know the kind of calls we've been getting. They're like desperation calls. Because you can't make them—and it takes you months and months to get them set. We did it in weeks.

The people did an incredible job. I was very proud of them. There's not been something like this, like, since World War II, you know. Especially that, because it's a big piece of equipment. Very expensive and very complex. You know, it's a very highly complex piece. The air has to flow at a certain level. You know, everything is—it's a very, very complex piece of equipment.

So it's a good question. But we have many countries calling, and we're helping as many as we can.

Coronavirus Severity

Q. Sir, when you said a little while ago here that this was a worse attack than Pearl Harbor and 9/11, are you suggesting that COVID-19 is an actual act of war? Or——

The President. I view it as a—well, I view the invisible enemy as a war. I don't like how it got here because it could have been stopped. But no, I view the invisible enemy like a war. Hey, it's killed more people than Pearl Harbor, and it's killed more people than the World Trade Center. World Trade Center was close to 3,000. Well, we're going to beat that by many times, unfortunately.

So yes. This—we view it as a war. This is a mobilization against a war. It's a—in many ways, it's a tougher enemy. You know, we do very well against the visible enemies. It's the invisible enemy. This is an invisible enemy. So—but we're doing a good job.

Availability of Medical Supplies and Equipment

Q. What's your assessment, Mr. President, of the volunteer program that Jared Kushner put in place to ramp up PPE? And did it, as—has been charged in a couple of news articles, favor people with political connections to you?

The President. So I just heard that. I can only say this: These were young, brilliant people that were brought in because they have great expertise in this; people that love the country, people that I don't think were paid anything. In fact, some of them were very rich people, where they were able to sell their company. I mean, some people would say "nerds." [*Laughter.*] Okay? This is what they do.

And I think they helped us a lot on ventilators. I wasn't involved in that, but I think they helped us a lot. You know, to they—to them, they can look at a ventilator, and it's a very simple machine. Somebody else looks at it; they have no clue. I think they did an incredible job.

Now, I don't know anything about any of the details of it, but it was a well-oiled machine. They were able to get things that nobody else was able to get. They got good pricing. Pricing, by the way, was not the most important element, but pricing was still, you know—pricing is pricing. But we were able to get gowns and gloves and masks and all these things at a very early point. Now we're making a lot of them. You saw it yesterday, where we're making masks at Honeywell.

But I will say—Deborah, you saw it too—I mean, the level of ramp-up that we did so quickly. So I would say they did—I wasn't involved in the details, but I could tell you, it started flowing. That was the—with the planes pouring in all—from all over the place.

Former Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority Director Rick A. Bright

Q. And did the program in any way favor suppliers who had a political connection to you?

The President. Well, I don't even know that, because I have no idea who—who bought. I wasn't involved in that. We have a lot of support in our campaign. A lot of people are supporting our campaign. They want to see us win very badly. So I don't know. Do they have companies? Do they not have companies? I can tell you, these—I don't believe these kids would have any knowledge of any of these companies. Any of these companies.

And you know, like I had seen this Dr. Bright—I had never met Dr. Bright. I don't know who he is. I didn't hear good things about him. I did not hear good things about him at all. And to me, he seems like a disgruntled employee that's trying to help the Democrats win an election by getting out. I mean, he's got a pretaped sermon about, you know, what he thinks. And I can tell you, they didn't think he did a very particularly good job, as I understand it.

Now, I just got this this morning, because I'm saying, "Who is this guy?" But I never met him. I know nothing about him. But he's a disgruntled guy. And I don't think disgruntled people should be working for a certain administration. I mean, he certainly seemed to have a very well-packaged deal. And he's got the same lawyers that some other well-known people had. And he comes up with the whistleblower. I always thought whistleblower was sort of a secret thing. Well, everyone knows who he is, so why is it a whistleblower?

Q. It just offers protection. It doesn't guarantee you any anonymity.

The President. Protection from what? Protection from what?

Q. Retribution.

The President. But everybody knows who he is, because he was very public about it. And if you look at his lawyers, his lawyers are the same lawyers that other people have used. And so I—I don't know much about it, but to me, he seems like a disgruntled employee.

Coronavirus Mortality Data

Q. Mr. President, about the figures right now, are you——

The President. Which figures?

Q. Figures—the death toll figures in the United States, over 70,000. Do you believe those figures?

The President. Well, I think what it is—it is what it is, from—you're saying it's 70,000. It's approximately now 70,000. So do I believe them? Yes.

Q. You don't have reason to cast doubt——

The President. I don't believe them from China.

Q. Yes.

The President. And I don't believe them from other countries, where I see, you know, a very tiny number of people died, but you're watching the news, and you see what's going on.

But our numbers are—you know—essentially certified numbers. They're individual hospitals; they're putting out the numbers. I don't imagine there'd be a very big variation.

No, it's a big number, but it's also a number that it's at the lower scale—I think, Deborah, you could say—it's at the very lower scale of any number that we—that was predicted. Because if

you look at the predictions, I guess they said from 100- to 220,000. That's if we did the big shut-ins and if we went to the total shutdown. And now it's time to open up our country. We're going to open up our country.

Okay. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you, John.

Q. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:07 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Doug Mills, photographer, New York Times; Kevin Reynolds, husband of Gov. Reynolds; National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony S. Fauci; Nelson Peltz, chief executive officer and founding partner, Triun Fund Management, L.P., in his capacity as chairman of the board of directors of the Wendy's Co.; and National Economic Council Director Lawrence A. Kudlow. A reporter referred to White House Senior Advisor Jared C. Kushner.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Gov. Kimberly K. Reynolds of Iowa, meeting with President; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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Names: Birx, Deborah L.; Bright, Rick A.; Fauci, Anthony S.; Kudlow, Lawrence A.; Mills, Doug; Pedati, Caitlin; Peltz, Nelson; Pence, Michael R.; Perdue, George E. "Sonny"; Reynolds, Kevin; Reynolds, Kimberly K.

Subjects: Agriculture : Domestic production, strengthening efforts; Agriculture : Food markets and prices; Agriculture : Meatpacking industry, strengthening efforts; Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Government and private sector, coordination efforts; China : Coronavirus outbreak; China : Trade agreement with U.S.; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; Coronavirus pandemic, international cooperation efforts; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; France : Coronavirus outbreak; Germany : Coronavirus outbreak; Health and Human Services, Department of : Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA); Health and Human Services, Department of : National Institutes of Health; Health and medical care : Medical equipment and supplies; India : Coronavirus outbreak; Iowa : Governor; Italy : Coronavirus outbreak; Japan : Coronavirus outbreak; Nigeria : Coronavirus outbreak; South Korea : Coronavirus outbreak; Spain : Coronavirus outbreak; White House Coronavirus Task Force; White House Office : Coronavirus Response Coordinator; White House Office : Coronavirus Task Force; White House Office : Economic Council, National; White House Office : Vice President.

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